CASE STUDY: MUTE IN THE CASINO

A Debate on Disability Representation, Character Analysis, and Editorial Intent

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THE DISABILITY DEBATE

Proposition 1:

Mute in The Casino is glorifying disability. It's not very common for disabled people to be like that character — to be persuasive, to be manipulative. That's why I say it's glorifying.

Proposition 2:

Disabled people are still equal. They're capable of being objectively morally bad, just like any other people. Invalidating that experience is discrimination. You're turning them into motivational figures, something to be acknowledged and celebrated just

because they were born that way, not because they are human beings who are capable of doing what is right and what is wrong.

Proposition 1:

You're framing these people as someone who is capable when they are not capable of such things. These people are already facing discrimination, so they should be portrayed in a way that does not implicate them, that does not accuse them of being bad people, because they are already suffering enough.

Proposition 2:

Anyone can be accused of that. A politician can be accused, a child can be accused, anyone could be accused. No one in the world is purely morally correct, and no one is purely morally wrong.

Proposition 1:

That may be correct, but people can distinguish what is morally right and what is morally wrong. Why are you implicating people that are already suffering enough, that have already suffered enough? Do you have no empathy?

Proposition 2:

Why are you saying that as if I don't have moral judgment, as if I don't have empathy? Are you using that against me? You're accusing me of something I did not say. That is also a type of invalidation. That kind of mentality pushes these people to become introverted, to not be able to speak, because you push them down into a box that shouldn't have been theirs. They shouldn't have been put in that box. They shouldn't have been subjected to your observations about who they are supposed to be. They are who they are and who they want to be, regardless of whether that is morally correct or morally wrong.

Proposition 1:

Your argument is weak, because not everyone is capable of thinking, especially people that are disabled. These people cannot do judgment themselves, so they are not capable of fighting back. If you accuse them, you are implicating them. You are making their situation worse.

Proposition 2:

Why are you repeating an argument that has already been addressed? I already said disabled people are people who are capable. You keep saying they are disabled because you believe they are disabled. You're accusing me of something that is not my statement. My statement was that yes, there are physical things

that hinder them. That does not mean they are hindered in every other way. Did you read the character? Did you read the book? The character was strong enough even if he cannot speak, even if he cannot express every opinion. You are invalidating that experience too. You are invalidating the person. You see the disability, not the actual person.

Proposition 1:

That is not valid, because it is not a real person. It is just a depiction of a fictional character. Therefore it is not based on reality.

Proposition 2:

You're wrong again. You say it is fictional, but it is something that should be celebrated because it gives voices, it gives an image to these people that they are able to be that person, to be free, to be themselves. They are able to be depicted in a way that is not standard. They can be whoever they want.

Proposition 1:

Yes, they can be whoever they want, but you are depicting them in a way that is not good. Therefore the book does not push them well. Your proposition is invalid because it is contradicting itself. In the first place you said it should be an actual way for them to be depicted so they can be free. But you are depicting

them in a way that is not morally correct. So your proposition is weak.

CRITICAL REVIEWS

Review from Samar Khalefa (Cairo Psychologist)

Review based on Part 1–2 only

In general, I stopped reading at the end of Part 2. My notes are:

The story expresses the effect of trauma caused in a girl's life because of her father on her men's choice. As when she feels attracted to a man in the casino who looked like a doll she had in her childhood, but her father broke it, she creates a traumatic bond which is based on the insistence of having what she lost.

Until the second part begins, there is scarce clarification or truth revealing about the psychological background of the main character, which may make the reader feel disengaged, unless they are enjoying the mature content which is extensive and very detailed in the written chapters I read.

Review from Micho (Non-Fiction Reader & 1st Year Psychology Student)

Mute in the Casino: A Gamble Between Love and Madness

Some stories are meant to be read. Others are meant to survive.

Mute in the Casino by Angel Baby is a disturbing yet strangely captivating story where love does not arrive wearing a halo—it arrives carrying a knife. From the beginning, the casino feels less like a place of gambling and more like a reflection of the characters themselves: dark, filthy, unpredictable, and filled with people willing to bet pieces of themselves just to feel something.

Victor is at the center of this very chaos. His relationship with Illay immediately shows that affection can become a cage. Illay's possessiveness is not disguised as love; it is love twisted until it becomes controlled. Then comes the mute—the "doll" Victor recognizes almost instantly. What makes their encounter fascinating is not simply attraction, but recognition. Victor sees something familiar in him, something connected to the broken doll from his childhood. A shattered porcelain toy becomes a metaphor for something much deeper: innocence that

was broken, remembered, and perhaps desperately wanted back.

What makes the story more compelling is its silence. The mute cannot speak, yet somehow he says more than everyone else. Through gestures, he communicates Come here, Thank you, and You are mine. His silence becomes its own language, proving that communication is not always made of words.

The casino, therefore, becomes more than a setting. It becomes a metaphor for Victor's life. Every relationship is a gamble. Every choice has a price. Every affection carries the possibility of destruction.

And perhaps that is what makes the book unsettling: it asks whether people sometimes confuse being wanted with being loved.

In this story, nobody walks away clean.

Some leave with a stain of blood on their hands.

Others leave with blood shed on their hearts.

ANALYTICAL SECTIONS

History of Victor

The subtext of Mute in the Casino extends across the entire work, from Part I to Part VII. Victor's history is

present throughout the novella, but it is rarely presented through lengthy exposition or emotional monologues. Significant events—his parents, his past, his work under Illay, and the development of their relationship—are disclosed in fragments and passing observations rather than dramatic revelations.

Unlike many protagonists who explain themselves through flashbacks or introspective monologues, Victor does not function that way. He is emotionally numb, detached, and often unable to process his own experiences. As a result, memories enter the narrative almost incidentally. Events that would be life-defining for another character are described with the same weight as ordinary observations.

Had Victor been more emotionally expressive, Mute in the Casino might have become a longer and more conventional novel. Instead, the novella relies heavily on subtext. The reader learns about Victor's history not because he chooses to explain it, but because traces of it emerge through his behavior, language, and perception.

This approach may cause some readers to view Victor as flat, unlikable, or underdeveloped. However, these qualities are not necessarily flaws. They are consequences of the novel's chosen perspective. Victor's narration is focused less on emotional interpretation and more on external observation. He

notices details, actions, and routines, but frequently struggles to assign emotional meaning to them.

Consequently, violence, exploitation, and suffering often appear mundane within the narrative. The story does not treat them as shocking because Victor himself has become desensitized to them. What would be alarming to another narrator is normalized by him.

This creates a demanding reading experience. The novel provides enough information for readers to reconstruct Victor's history, but rarely highlights what is important. A passive reader may become confused about relationships, identities, or motivations because the narrative refuses to signal significance in conventional ways. The reader is expected to participate actively, assembling meaning from fragments rather than receiving direct explanations.

In this sense, the central challenge of Mute in the Casino is not understanding the plot but understanding Victor. The novella offers sufficient evidence to do so, but only for readers willing to engage with its subtext.

Second Layer: Subtext and Characterization

Throughout the first chapter of Mute in the Casino, the narrative appears to focus on violence and the sexual

tension between Illay and Victor, the protagonist. On a surface level, readers may interpret the chapter as excessively vulgar or aggressive. However, the subtext points toward something different: Victor is exhausted, emotionally detached, and increasingly prone to dehumanizing the people around him. He speaks with little filter, not because he is attempting to shock others, but because his perspective has been shaped by prolonged exposure to hardship.

This is evident from the opening passage:

"Every time I walked through these doors, it stank of piss. It was sour and musty, smelling of marijuana and sweat from the addict mutts, while cigarette smoke pooled above our heads like clouds."

The description is notable not for its brutality, but for its familiarity. Victor does not react with disgust or surprise. Instead, he catalogues the environment with the detached precision of someone who has seen it countless times before.

This is reinforced immediately afterward when he remarks:

"It smells like sex."

Such an observation suggests a degree of lived experience that the narrative has not yet disclosed. Someone unfamiliar with these environments would be less likely to identify the atmosphere in such

specific terms. More importantly, Victor is not alarmed by what he perceives. He is merely bothered by it. The distinction is important because it reveals how normalized these experiences have become for him.

As a result, some readers may misinterpret the chapter's emphasis on violence, sexuality, and vulgarity as a flaw in the prose or characterization. Yet these details function as indirect characterization. They imply a history that the novel deliberately withholds. Through Victor's observations, the reader senses that he has lived through experiences the narrative has not yet explained.

Mute in the Casino is therefore not primarily plot-driven. The story is filtered through Victor's consciousness, and the novel exercises control by withholding information. Readers are not given a complete account of Victor's past; instead, they are asked to infer it from the way he perceives and describes the world. Whether Victor is likable is ultimately secondary. The first chapter's purpose is not to make him sympathetic, but to establish a perspective shaped by exhaustion, familiarity with vice, and a lifetime of unspoken experiences.

Subtext as Technique

One of the reasons Mute in the Casino feels bigger than it is, is that the story tends to describe details in passing.

The main purpose was to make Victor feel like a 3D-dimensional person. If we had read the different parts of the book, somebody might not be able to say that Victor has a past that the book hasn't talked about, but they will feel it subconsciously.

This technique is one of the hardest to master. It's called control: the ability to reveal information on the surface level so it functions below the actual plot as a stronger subtext.

Throughout the story, Victor's motivations, values, and conflicts are revealed bit by bit until the end of the book. Victor feels like someone whose story or background we never fully knew.

The reader can conclude and interpret in different ways; however, no one can say with certainty. That leaves a gap, and mysteries are good retainers because the book is alive in the reader's head, therefore making the book seem bigger than it is.

Within the book, the story functions on two levels: the surface, which is the plot sometimes theatrical and absurd—while the second layer reveals snippets of Victor's mind that you won't be able to catch if you just skim.

That is the thematic subtext of the whole book: you feel, not hear, the words through the paper.

Character Analysis: Dolly

Dolly is often described through Victor's perception as almost mystical: beautiful, vulnerable, elusive, and difficult to understand. His apparent vulnerability becomes a means of attaching himself to Victor. He is frequently seen holding Victor, particularly in ways that provoke Illay, suggesting that Dolly understands the emotional significance of Victor within Illay's world.

Dolly is also highly perceptive. Because he is deaf and mute, his attention is frequently conveyed through intense observation rather than speech. He appears to study the people around him closely, and it does not take long for him to recognize that Victor is important to Illay. From there, Dolly begins to position himself around Victor, gradually becoming a source of tension between the two men.

The narrative also implies that Dolly possesses knowledge that Victor does not. His relationship with his captor, the Russian, is deliberately unclear, leaving open the question of whether the Russian acted independently or whether Dolly's circumstances were somehow orchestrated. Dolly does not behave with

the fear or desperation Victor might expect from someone in his position. This ambiguity contributes to his mysterious character.

It could be interpreted as a plot inconsistency, but the narrative's treatment of Dolly makes the uncertainty more deliberate than definitive. Victor rarely perceives Dolly as an ordinary person with a fully accessible interior life. Instead, he gradually begins to associate Dolly with something larger and more unsettling—an embodiment of his own trauma, desire, and emotional deprivation.

Dolly's disability is therefore not presented simply as an obstacle. His inability to communicate conventionally becomes part of the narrative's uncertainty surrounding him. He communicates primarily through sign language and physical presence, speaking comparatively little while nevertheless exerting considerable influence over the people around him. His silence does not make him passive. In many scenes, his presence changes the emotional direction of the narrative without requiring extensive dialogue.

Yet Dolly remains the least developed of the central characters. Victor's history and Illay's relationship with him receive considerably more attention, while Dolly's own history, motivations, and internal thoughts remain largely inaccessible. The reader knows that he

possesses agency and influence, but not precisely where that influence comes from or what he ultimately wants.

This creates an unusual imbalance between character development and plot development. Dolly is less developed psychologically than Victor or Illay, but he is highly developed in terms of his effect on the narrative. His arrival alters the relationship between Victor and Illay, redirects Victor's attention, and becomes one of the primary forces driving the story forward.

Dolly therefore functions as both a character and a narrative disturbance. Even when Illay dominates a scene with Victor, Dolly can continue to command attention from the background. Victor watches him obsessively, while the other characters remain uncertain about who Dolly really is or what kind of life he had before entering the story.

This makes Dolly the novella's background anchor: the least understood central character and, simultaneously, one of its most important. His silence creates space for interpretation. The reader is given very little direct access to his thoughts, yet almost everything surrounding him invites questions.

Character Analysis: Illay (Emotionally Stunted)

Illay, Victor's lover and contractor, is also a sample of a 3D character. He comes into the first chapter as a violent person who sees Victor as property.

But in between Part II to Part X, Illay's motivation becomes clear. He calls Victor his employee, yet he cared enough to cook him porridge.

Especially because before that, he threatened Victor that he was just a contractor and he could leave whenever he wanted. This causes Victor to shift his attention, and Illay's jealousy becomes apparent.

He was terrified of losing Victor. It stemmed from his childhood fear of Alex stealing what he believed was meant to be his, especially the position Victor had in his life. That was the reason why he was hostile to Dolly from the start and only mellowed down when he realized he either loses to Dolly or loses his lover, Victor.

He showed love through action because he was unable to process emotions into words. He often became violent, pointing guns and beating people. Sometimes, he forces Victor into sex due to jealousy. Violence is his comfort because he is unable to process emotions through words; he diverts to action.

His morality is screwed, but his love for Victor changes him. When Victor begged to have sex to forget the pain, he stopped, saying it was wrong. Even

then, he had apologized to Victor. Seeing Victor break because of Alex makes him break too. Victor is his anchor, and he is ultimately dependent on him.

Not only is Illay emotionally stunted, he also has dependency and possessiveness toward Victor, a hallmark of trauma bonding during his childhood. You cannot place him as a good person or a bad person. Yes, he loves Victor enough to step down, and he is also violent enough to beat a woman to death.

Illay is the type of unpredictable character on the surface, but his values stay the same. He is afraid to be left alone, and he also craves stability and absolute control that he did not have before, hence his territorial strike.

The fact that he is capable of caring and deranged actions is a hallmark of someone who is not born that way, but rather someone for whom violence was normalized.

Ultimately, Illay is like a man who was taught the wrong thing in childhood and was never reprimanded for it. To him, it is normal regardless.

Narrative Technique: The Unreliable Narrator

Unreliable narrators are narrators whose accounts cannot be taken entirely at face value. The reader

does not know whether they are telling the truth, lying to themselves, misunderstanding events, or simply perceiving the world differently.

There are usually two broad types of unreliable narrators. The first consists of narrators whose accounts actively derail the reader from the truth through lies, omissions, or delusional perceptions. The actual story is often revealed toward the end, forcing the reader to reinterpret what they previously believed. This approach is commonly found in stories involving lost love, regret, and tragedy, although it is not limited to those themes.

The second type is represented by Victor. Rather than deliberately lying or perceiving reality incorrectly, Victor focuses on different things from the information that is actually relevant to the story. This distracts the reader and causes them to overlook important hints. When the final revelation occurs, the reader realizes that the clues were present all along but were hidden in plain sight.

The downside is that this form of unreliable narration can be difficult to execute. If handled poorly, the revelation may feel unearned, resulting in a weak character resolution or an ending that feels flat and unsatisfying.

Central Theme: Obsession

Honestly, one of the weaknesses of Mute in the Casino is that its core themes are ambiguous on the surface, but once you strip away the violence, dissociation, and trauma, they become very clear.

Say we strip away Illay's violence toward Dolly, or even Victor's immediate attraction to him. The motifs keep repeating: Dolly keeps making Victor feel like he is important to him, whatever the motive may be.

It has always been obsession, whether it is the way Victor keeps seeing the doll as an embodiment of Dolly, to the point of actual delusion, or Illay's hold through his "contractor" role because he refuses to admit that he loves Victor and is obsessed with him to the point that he would rather hurt him than say he likes him too.

All of these people have functioned through obsession. Even in the ending, Victor still returned home.

It might be love or something twisted. It might be for the reader to know.

CRITICAL ESSAY

Why Is the Disabled Character Morally Gray?

Why Do Books That Portray Disabled People as Manipulative Feel Like Appropriation or Accusation?

Mute in the Casino is perhaps one of the most unique books I have encountered. If I were to be completely honest, I would say that the portrayal of the disabled person in the story as manipulative, highly sexual, and almost elusive is striking.

However, I question whether this is a good look for the press. Why push a book like this when society already discriminates against disabled people? These people already struggle. Not once have I encountered a portrayal so blatantly presenting a disabled person as "morally gray."

Is this not invalidating the motivational image that people have worked hard to create so that disabled people will not be belittled or treated like children? The goal has been to allow them to be seen as a source of hope rather than as objects of pity.

A book like this does not answer my question. What purpose did you publish this for? Was it to show that disabled people are capable of being more than the moral image society has created for them, or was it to invalidate the difficulties they experience?

This book gives me more questions than answers.

AUTHOR'S COMMENTARY

I Know It's Violent

As violent as Mute in the Casino is, the book has actually received three to four traditional publishing offers. Some left me hanging for contracts, while others offered terms I refused to accept. Ultimately, that didn't matter to me anyway.

When I reread this work, I tend to see it as trash. Many editors have told me there are two types of authors: those who are deeply in love with their books and fiercely defend them against editorial changes, and those who look back at their work and see nothing but flaws. I must have been the former. Yes, I started the book, but as soon as that initial feeling faded, I stopped chasing it. Even now, I find Mute in the Casino unconventional, violent, and heavy to read.

I would have loved to credit my deaf teacher, but she would probably prefer to remain anonymous. She was once a student leader, and she was also my friend.

When I look back at the book, I don't understand why I wrote it as though I were sitting inside that room. Readers often tell me that it is overly descriptive. To me, many of its sentences feel unpolished, yet several readers have told me to leave them that way because the roughness contributes to the characterization.

Ultimately, it didn't matter to me. Mute in the Casino became a way for me to test Harlet's actual publishing pipeline.

This Sucks

I've long known that I would eventually see this work as an editor rather than as an author. Not only is the work short, but it is also filled with plot holes that would have been addressed in a deeper developmental edit.

It is also difficult to position in the market.

If I can market this successfully, it also means I now understand which publishing and marketing pipelines a book can be tailored to. These opening chapters also serve multiple purposes at once: a sample, an ARC, a reader's guide, and a form of author introduction.

I don't want to overly praise either Harlet or Mute in the Casino. I have never been able to fully see the scale of what I've built, and I don't know whether that's a blessing or a curse. Perhaps that distance is useful. It keeps me focused on the work rather than the achievement.

Theatrical, Right?

Honestly, this passage sounds almost comedic to me —a tantrum that seems to have some reasoning behind it. Some readers will hate it, others won't.

Nevertheless, it has already been approved as a test subject, so I can no longer complain.

That's me, eyes heavy with eyebags, writing and running Harlet under a purple light while managing finances, planning outreach, and doing whatever I can to make Harlet feel more human than corporate.

I wanted this book to succeed not for myself, but as proof that what I've built is feasible for other authors as well.

Over the past months, I've spent a great deal of time forging connections, and I've genuinely enjoyed doing it. At the same time, I've drifted away from relationships, friends, girlfriends, and boyfriends alike. When you're trying to build something, every hour begins to feel valuable, and unnecessary distractions become harder to justify.

Maturity hit me like a truck. Not only was I constantly moving between schedules, but I also found myself avoiding shallow interactions. Strangely enough, I don't regret it.

People seem more inclined to cling to me these days. Perhaps it's because I come across as warm, and they make assumptions based on that. The irony is that I

often struggle to maintain a cold, professional distance.

Maybe part of that comes from studying the human mind as a degree. The more time I spend observing people, the more difficult it becomes to treat them as transactions, statistics, or opportunities. Even when professionalism is necessary, I still find myself interested in the person behind the conversation.

END OF CASE STUDY